Archives

The Mole

Fall 1998

Precious moments,
Tender moments,
Rise to consciousness
In pre-dawn reverie
Between asleep and awake

Memories so sacred
Yet lost in time.
I read them
Like old love-letters found,
Savoring each word,
Treasuring the uniqueness
Of the handwriting.

Tie them with serenity
And ribbons of blue;
Slip them in that special place,
Secure and near--
To keep forever
The love they speak.

by Phyllis Kendall

THE MOLE

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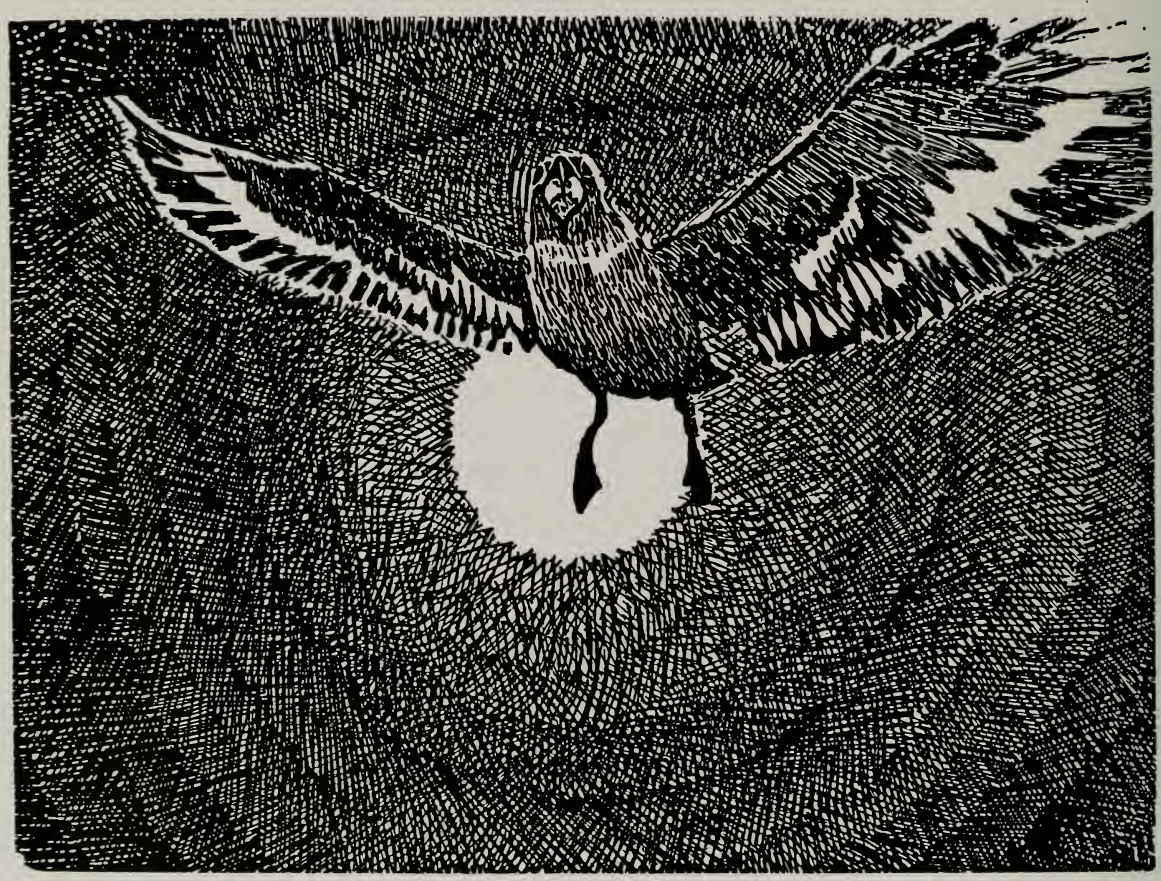
Works may be submitted to any staff member or dropped in the i Publications mailbox across the hallway from the student mailboxes.



by T Holden

We'll soar away
away, away, away...

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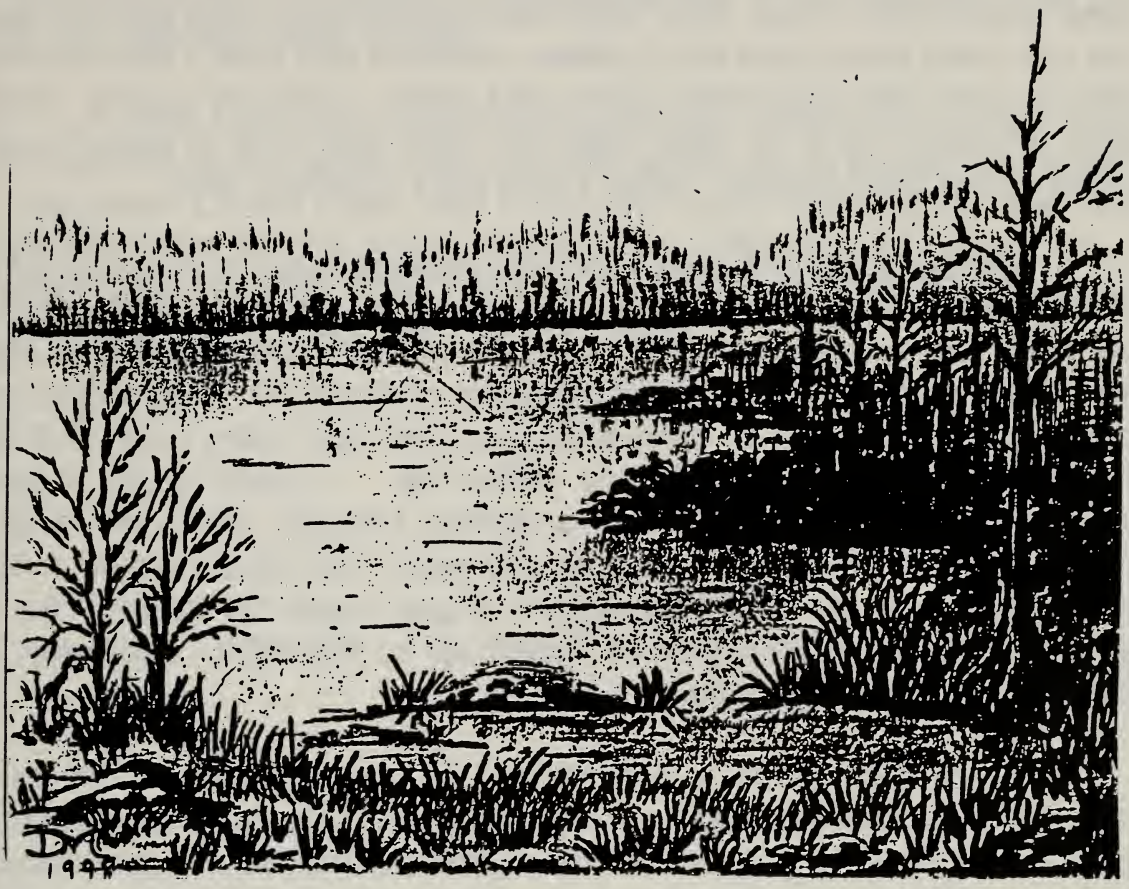

by Dottie Munroe

Message to my Unborn Son

Todd. That's what I would have named you, because I always knew you were a boy. The nurses told me so the day we were separated. They were kind and concerned and patted my hair as I cried deep sobs into a pillow. When it was over, I tried not to picture your tiny embryonic face, but every night for a long time after, I dreamt only of dark eyes an curly hair and a baby's cry straight from the heavens. Wasn't that you? I know it was.

My belly ached, and I rocked endless hours in a chair with vacant arms dying to hold onto something...an idea, a relationship, my baby...oh, mostly my baby, but none of them seemed to fit in my life. Can you forgive me for this delayed confession? I managed to find emotional rescue by convincing my self you were better off in the care of angels than in my pitiful life. I could never have surrendered you to adoption, wandering through all of my days, imagining who you were and how you were and how I would ever live without you. At least I knew that angels could be trusted. So, I gave the most precious part of myself up to paradise. That way, I always knew you'd be safe.

More than once I tried to get to you, to your world, but something, something always held me back. The gun never went off, the pills never took, the knife only grazed my wrist. I'm grounded to this earth, it seems, for some unknown reason. But I've come to think that we've passed through each other before, maybe at another time, in another life. Who's to say it's not possible? I need to hope it is.

You haven't missed much on this side. Children still go hungry, men are still driven by power and greed, and night still follows day. Actually, there hasn't been one night in twenty years when I haven't looked to the stars for a sign of you. Trouble is, there's lots of stars. I guess you have plenty of company.

About your father... I loved him desperately. You were conceived the way a child should be...two souls meshed together, one completing the other. But passion quickly turned to pain when his responsibility became real. That was never his strength. He was best at being charming and handsome and a silly ass. Truth is, I still

love him a little after all this time, even after you and everything in between. You both own the space around my heart, the place where love flows to all things holy in my life. It's where the small part of you still lives inside of me.

Was I wrong to make that choice? I still don't know. Some would say that I defiled your sanctity, even go so far as to call me a murderer. Others claim that it was my "right" to choose. I've lived twenty years on the fence not knowing what to call myself. But, I know one thing for sure...I would change it all if, for even just one moment, I could hear you call me "mom."

by Denise Tagan

Broken

Broken pieces of broken things
Lie broken on the faded broken tile
Broken promises and broken strings
Broken dreams and broken smiles
Broken limbs and broken wings
Give these broken things
Time to heal
And hand in hand
We'll soar away
away, away, away, from broken things.

by E.S.P.

Thought Inhibitor

Then there was man, possessed with logic and reason. Endowed with an innate desire to improve the quality of his life, creative in his endeavors, implementing machines to lighten his burden, entertain, and explore the vast universe in which he resides. His imagination and ingenuity have made dreams a reality and machines his subordinates--sometimes.

Certain machines have been marvelous successes, others complete failures, and still others are sitting on the fence teetering in both directions. One such device poised and waiting final judgment is the television. An interesting invention, born first as an instrument of war, it is now raising havoc in almost every American household. This domestic baby sitter fills our head with nonsense, creates an urgency to purchase worthless items we cannot afford, and attempts to prevent us from performing the most important task of all, thinking.

Watching television, we need not use our brain but instead can permit someone else's thoughts to penetrate and form opinions as if they were our own. We need then not think about or examine the issues of the world but are able to parrot the conclusions of highly compensated actors. This instrument is rapidly infiltrating an entire generation, creating a population of thoughtless "couch potatoes."

This was not man's intent. The television has become the reciprocal of its original vision. It has transformed itself from a creative ingenious slave of man to a monster that demands control and constant attention. A demon whose sole purpose is to manipulate and devour our very being. Its only defense is the occasional redeeming program that stimulates and touches the human spirit: the documentary that depicts its subject matter without bias or prejudice, similar to content found in many books. Ah, the books: manuscripts that trigger the prowess of the mind, rejuvenate the spirituality of man, and remind humanity of its original mission, to think.

by John K. Davick

Kissing Cousins

Every year, right around this time of year, I think of Daniel, Danny--God, do I miss you. Love you. Wish you were here. And wonder. Why, Danny, why? If you had only known how many of us loved you. I loved you from a distance, but the bond was always there. I always loved your smile, your laugh, the way you threw your head to the side--so carefree.

Kissing Cousins, the many pictures of our friendship, kinship, our public kisses caught on photographs so many times. God, do I miss our days in Kindergarten, the morning bus ride that we used to pass by playing Bugs Bunny with your lunch box. I remember how you would pretend to eat a carrot and yell "What's up, Doc?" The two of us would roll on the muddy, slushy, aisle of the big yellow bus in hysterical laughter.

I remember when you fell off the bed at Grammy's house and cracked your head on the radiator, and how I cried in fear that you would not return from the hospital as the same cousin I had grown to love.

I remember when you moved to Baldwinville. I used to wish your parents would decide to move you back to Gardner so we could go to school together. I have always remained bitter that my mother took our friendship away because of her own selfish ways. God, Danny, I miss you.

Whenever I feel anger over how you took yourself away from me on this same day three years ago, I remember the day we had a picture war. We chased each other around the house for hours, taking pictures of each other, and I always laugh when I imagine what my face must have looked like when you told me that you didn't have any film in your camera. All I could think of was what the film developer would think of when he developed all those pictures I took of your better half as you tried to run from me.

And then, on some of my more depressing days when I don't want to be cheered, I think of my graduation day. I remember how I missed the entire procession of speakers, I was too busy wishing you were graduating with me that day. I was too busy wondering if you were there watching me, being proud of me as I had been proud of you so many times before, just because you were my cousin and we were so close.

God, Danny, I do miss you, and I love you and that will never change.

by Stacy Downs

Sleeping,
My daughter curled beside me;
Warm breathing, soft skin, shampoo-scented hair,
No longer a baby but still a little girl;
I trace her profile on the pillow.
Shadows dance on my bedroom walls in the moonlight.
In the exquisite tenderness of this moment,
A memory--
Flooding back, cloudy, as if in a dream....
I am sleeping in my grandmother's bed,
Upstairs in the house on Baltic Street.
Awakening ever so slightly,
Just enough to consciously rouse
And recognize in the blackness
the familiar shapes of furniture,
Before the shock of "where am I?"
Can startle me awake,
I feel my grandmother
Breathing beside me.
She smells of talcum powder and lavender.
Smooth sheets and warm blankets wrap us,
We are nestled together in silence.
I feel the comfort
Of my grandmother's arm around my waist.
She holds me close to her.
Between sleep and waking,
At this vulnerable hour,
Under cover of darkness
She whispers to me, "I love you, sweetie-pie.
You are so precious to me,"
Words she would never speak

In the harshness of day
When I am one of twenty grandchildren,
Words that would lose their power
In the light.
The darkness lends her words
new life and meaning,
A kind of sacredness
that could not survive
The light of dawn.
I snuggle into my grandmother.
Her love flows through me and surrounds me,
And I feel it and absorb it and most assuredly,
I know it....
The memory comes crashing like a wave.
That she felt this kind of love for me
Is a sudden revelation: amazing, empowering,
And though my grandma is dead she lives on.
This depth of love grows on and is passed on.
I sit up slowly in the darkness,
Leaning over my daughter. My heart swells
With a love so strong it hurts.
Fast memory and present reality join hands.
My daughter becomes me
And I become my daughter,
Little girl filled with wonder and gratitude
For this transcendent gift--
A gift which, at the time it was given,
Was not recognized for its power or longevity.
Moonlight floods the room.
My tears drop softly, silently--
Holy water bathing my daughter's face
As she dreams, unaware.

by Kim Peckham

I am the god of small things:
clean, folded laundry,
gleaming, polished tablelegs,
sparkling silverware,
freshly baked cookies.
I am the god of small things:
just-swept floors,
plump, soft bath towels,
sun-dried sheets,
dinner in the oven.
I am the god of small things:
winter boots and mittens,
sweet scented baths,
drawers full of socks,
good books and music.
I tell bedtime stories and sing lullabyes,
I keep the boogie-man away,
I smooth the twisted, sweaty bedclothes,
I kiss you while you are sleeping,
I am the god of small things.
I am the god of small things.
I am.

by Kim Peckham

...and a pair of mittens!

Confused by the fairy tales I loved, I once asked, "Daddy, are we rich or poor?" The answer, "In the middle." I liked that, liked being "in the middle" along with everyone else, for I knew no one with the riches of storybook kings or the poverty of Hansel and Gretel, until one January morning.

Christmas had been the usual magical time. A tree, decorations, new toys and books. So it was with sadness that my friend, Cookie, and I trudged over snow-packed sidewalks toward the reality of our neighborhood school. Ahead was the big white house where Jenna, the new girl, lived. I liked Jenna, but secretly envied her for having brothers and sisters.

Usually, Jenna would come bounding out and fall into step with us. Sometimes we didn't see her at all. This morning was different. Jenna was already waiting at the edge of the walk, excitedly hopping from one foot to the other. As she joined us, Jenna's face glowed with the news she could contain no longer.

"I got THREE presents for Christmas!" she announced. We stopped. Stunned, Cookie and I just looked at each other. Her eyes shining, Jenna held up three fingers and counted off. The first two I don't remember, but they were perfectly acceptable gifts, maybe a storybook and a board game. The third I'll never forget: "...and a pair of mittens!"

My childish mind did somersaults. Only three presents? And one of them a pair of mittens? Clothes you need anyway? And she's so happy?

For years afterward, the word "poor" conjured up the image of a little girl ecstatic over three presents for Christmas, one of them a pair of mittens. Now I know differently. Jenna was not poor. She was not even "in the middle." Jenna was one of the truly rich; one who found joy in whatever she had.

by Phyllis Kendall

The Loud Murmurs of the Cows, Gone

The boy jumped up onto the big cement stair and opened up the old, white, chipping, latchless door of the bulk house. Not in here. He took ten or twelve steps to the barn door, which was even more anciently painted, more gray now than white, and opened that. The loud melodramatic hum of the vent's fans almost overtook his fragile, gawky body.

"Hey, Trouble," he greeted the first cow he passed. Through the humps and haunches of the rows of innocent and lazy looking beasts, he finally found his cousin Joe. He would have yelled out his name, but due to his pre-pubescence, he hadn't developed a loud-enough barn voice to escape the carnivorous fans' motors. He hurtled, straddled and moseyed through the rows and their metal bar stalls toward his cousin, ever so cautiously avoiding large piles of manure. Finally, he was right in the center aisle, surrounded by two walls made up entirely of the rear ends of cows. These walls, mind you, were alive. So, while wandering down the hallway, he kept his eyes on all the tails. If there was even the slightest hint of movement, he was ready to run from deadly projectiles.

"It seems that's all cows do," he thought, "they eat, digest, and store their crap until I walk behind." It was almost a game for them.

"Joe," he said in a loud, half question.

"Hey there, Jeffray!" Joe's deep-lined, worrisome face suddenly became more youthful and lively. "Wuz wonderin' when you'd finally git here, knowin' how yer mom drives an' all."

"She doesn't drive that slow," the boy suddenly defended his mother from this seemingly painful insult.

"Yah, she does, it takes 'er near four days gettin' here."

Suddenly the boy understood Joe was trying to get the best of him. "It only takes her three days."

"I said NEAR four days," Joe reminded the boy with a half smirk. He looked quite goofy with his green CAT baseball hat planted on top of his skull, hair coming out from underneath with no particular direction. It was everywhere, but he was the type of person who looked okay with crazy uncombed hair; just a little goofy. He took off his hat to wipe the sweat from his forehead. Suddenly, a tail lifted. "Gawd DAMMIT!" he screamed. This wasn't a game for him. He just seemed to be sick of it all. "F***in' coaws!" Luckily, he moved out of the way enough so he wasn't drenched.

The rubber knee-high boots seemed to bear the brunt of the attack.

Now the boy's face was the one wearing a smirk. Like most young boys, holding in laughter was quite a task.

"Yeah. They'll gitchou by the end a the day too, there, Jeffray," Joe had caught the smirk.

So they started talking about everything two old friends normally would. What they've been up to, how things are going, but these two seemed to cut through all the superficials quite quickly. Soon, the simple farmer and the young boy were talking about life, death, reincarnation, God, the Big Bang theory. Somehow, every time they got together, an hour's worth of big shot college lectures were squeezed into several sentences.

The boy followed behind, moving the milking station with him as Joe would lean over, dipping the udders in an iodine treatment, wiping them off again and sticking the greedy silver milking machines right on. The boy would always watch the tube, mesmerized by the milk running through, hearing the hypnotic "Ch-Chee-Chit-Choo" sound coming from the system's air pump, and thinking about what was just said, usually just coming back with a "Yeah." Conversation wasn't his strong point.

Half an hour later, the milking was done. "Hey, Jeffray, you wanna tie off the rowt for me?"

"Okay." So the boy walked down and tied off the route and began unhitching the cows. Sometimes cows were quite happy with just sitting there eating, and they didn't want to move and there wasn't much you could do to get them out. Usually, stepping into their stalls was enough. Today was not any different than usual.

There was something Jeffrey loved about leading all the cows out to pasture. It was his favorite part of the day. Once the cows were gone, the barn was so starkly quiet. The fans were off, the milking machines were shut off. The loud murmurs of the cows, gone.

Finally, it was just the boy again; alone with his thoughts and a handful of calves and chickens. He took in a deep breath of air and ran toward the barn door, crossing the street on his way over to the farmhouse. He took off his dirty shoes and went inside looking for Joe. He was in the dining room reading the paper, sipping on a coke and occasionally complaining about the economics of farming.

"Hey, Jeffray, I'm goin' inta toawn. I gotta pick up some PVC pipin'. You wanna come along for the ride?"

"Sure. Can we stop at the store?"

"Well, uh, shoor."

They climbed into the old, rusty Chevy and rumbled down the street, windows open all the way, hair flapping wildly in every

direction. The ride into town was long, silent and peaceful. Endless fields of corn whizzed by and the clouds danced. It was the perfect day for a truck ride into town. They picked up the PVC pipe, and then on the way back, abruptly, the truck came to a gliding halt and Joe threw it into park. The store was, in itself, a cliché. There was an old man sitting out front in a rocking chair. Inside, there were four old men playing checkers. Joe and the boy grabbed whatever they could ever want to stuff into their mouths and brought it all up to the counter.

"Six dollars and thirty-five cents," the man behind the counter said.

"Awright. Put it on my tab," said Joe.

"Okay, thank you. Have a good day, boys."

"You, too," chorused the two.

They rolled back down the road toward the farm house and got out at their destination. The boy stretched his arms out and grunted a long sleepy weekend yawn. Inside the living room, they each found a couch. Almost immediately, they were both asleep, dreaming about life, death, God, the birth of the universe...

by Jeff Landry

Twelve Roses for Tania

A rose for your beauty
I first met at night
A rose for your embrace
That holds me so tight

A rose for your kindness
I feel in my heart
A rose for tomorrow
For when we're apart

A rose for your voice
So sweet to my ears
A rose for our romance
That has been hiding for years

A rose for the times
In the future we'll share
A rose for when you need me
I'll always be there

A rose for the songs
The birds sing through the air
A rose for the sun
That shines through your hair

A rose for your eyes
That reflect of sky blue
And a rose just to mention
That I care about you

by Wayne McPherson

Awakening at the Crack of Noon

My eyes open...I look out my window toward the sky...and the sun gets in my eyes. I had closed the drapes but my fan's on, despite it being the middle of autumn. There are times when I hate the sun--when it's burning in my newly opened eyes, for example, and when I try to close them and fade to black, it leaks through and all I see is red, a brightly annoying red, the red that flashes into the side of your eyes when you're driving down a road that's shady except for one spot. Sometimes I hate the color red. But I'm grateful that I'm here to see it.

My clock reads 12:03, in yet another annoyingly bright shade of red. At least I can ignore it. A small red dot tells me it's PM and not AM, even though that feature is currently unnecessary because Mr. Sun is using the time-tested and subtle burning-a-hole-in-your-cornea approach to getting me up. But I simply turn away. I'm not incredibly fond of sleeping on my left side, but it's my humble way of telling the sun to shove it. Today is my day, now is my time. I'm not going to let an invasive sun, or annoying clock, tell me what I can do today, and today I chose to slip back into sweet, euphoric slumber....

I pull the blankets up over my head, all four layers of them, even though one layer is a sheet. I'm not very concerned about specifics right now. Our family creed--the more blankets you have, the more comfortable you are--it's not something anybody else can understand. I deal with other people enough of the time, now is the time to fade to black and egress into ethereal slumber--not like all the other days when I have to wake up at horrid hours just to pursue things that really have very little interest to me, and where I have to slosh around half dead to the world six hours before I'm damn good and ready. I hate that; I hate facing the world on it's terms, at it's business hours. I'm not an early bird, I could give a whit about worms. I want the peace of sleep, a peace I can only get sleeping, because it seems like whenever I'm awake somebody or something is royally annoying me. But now is not the time for hate, anger or apocalyptic agendas. I'm busy (well, not so busy, dependent on

your perspective) trying to drift into slumber. I'll wake up sometime, you can't enjoy sleep without waking up, but not right now and it's going to be my choice, my accord and nobody and nothing else's. They bother me enough.

So with that, I bid consciousness adieu and go back where I can be at peace with the world.

by Chris Banahan

They perform a transcendent, wafting ballet upon invisible stages suspended in mid air--the wind choreographing...combing gently through flexible theatrical branches. They sway to the left, shivering at the peak of their performance, once again slumbering gracefully in harmonious momentum to an objective poise, in a basking dangle within the spotlight of sun.

I have been there, upon those stages. Choreographed my life to minute, exquisite, shivering heights. Ahh...that precise moment of achievement that once only existed on the apex of a wish-fulfilling dream.

by Betty Koziol

Love

Love is the doorway
to open our gates
Love is the shadow
where our happiness awaits
Love is the wisdom
to keep us from greed
Love sets us to blossom
Love is our seed

Love is our hand
stretched out to those in need
Love sees no gender,
no age, and no creed
Love is a smile
to uplift those with frowns
Love is letting another
wear the jewels and the crowns

Love is stepping back
from an unkind word
Love is the message
that to all must be heard
Love is language unspoken
with actions behind tongue
Love is our most precious gift given from the One

Love surrounds us
in every person and tree
Love protects us
with eternity
Love is the breeze
gently blown to comfort your face
Love is what lets me
love this place!

Love is.

by Justin Spencer

Life's Lonely Walls

We try so hard
From deep inside
To break down walls
And ties that bind
To find the soul
With which to share
Our deepest secrets
That lie right there

There, in that spot, where there is an immense desire to open up and show myself to her, let her see all that lies beyond the outer shell that we can all, so easily, hide behind. She has looked upon me each day with forgiving eyes. She has looked upon me with a loving heart. What more could I ask. I still get those seventh grade, back-of-the-neck chills when her hand brushes mine in a movie theater. In that moment, that accidental touch, she touches my heart and I touch hers, just for an instant. That's enough, and we both know it. We know it because we've both seen that spot...

Where no one goes
And in that place
Where no one knows
And keep inside
Life's lonely walls
We live behind

by Jamie Goodgion

Until Death--Do We Really Part

"I'm dying." What was that I heard? I turned around from cleaning off the table. At the top of the stairs was Fallon's best friend, Diana, looking at herself in the full-length mirror. My granddaughter, Fallon, was looking over Diana's shoulder, staring at their reflections.

I asked Diana, "What did you say; did I hear right?" My heart was pounding and my throat a little tight. My mind raced with the thoughts of cancer, A.I.D.S., and all kinds of horrid diseases. Diana threw up her arms in a gesture of "I give up."

She said, "Gram, I am dying, Fallon's dying, we're all dying. Don't you know--the whole world is dying!" I felt relief. I turned back to my work, shaking my head. Kids, what will they come out with next? Looking at Fallon, I thought how much she resembled her Aunt Tina.

I picked up the dishes and glasses off the table. Memories made little daydream flashes of my daughter whom I lost, Christina Lynn. She was a life-charged twenty-two year old.

There was a time that Tina would have jokingly said that in front of a mirror. She would flash her big blue eyes and toss her long, blonde hair back and giggle. I would smile back at her and tell her to knock it off, saying, "Not funny, Teenie."

Would things have been different if we had known how prophetic her jokes were? No, I am sure they would not have been. Destiny has its way of taking care of things. She was a part of the things we can not control. I think Tina knew this. She left too many signs that let me know this.

My child died a violent death by being beaten mercilessly by her boyfriend. Suffering broken ribs and a blood clot in the brain from a blow to the back of the head, she tried to escape and lost control of her car. I was numb. I felt nothing, emptiness--a part of

my soul ripped from me. I shut the door to her room. I would not allow anyone to enter it for months. It was left for her as if she were to return at any moment. Every car that came in the driveway sounded like hers. A click of the door, a foot step--is it Tina? The pain inside so unbelievable it felt as if my heart was outside my body burning with agony. Crying beyond tears, the heartache so excruciating, I begged for my own death. I asked God why. I blamed God. I cursed the man that caused her death. I was beyond hate for him; I pitied him. He would have this to think about until he died. Then I asked God for forgiveness.

My other daughters and family worried about my state of mind. Was their mother going to have a nervous breakdown? They whispered in low voices and gossiped amongst themselves.

They decided to contact my mother and have her come over to my home. My mother walked in the house saying her hellos to everyone. She gave me an understanding look and an all-encompassing hug of strength. "Snap out of this, Marianne!" she demanded. I was startled. "What are you doing! Look, open that door. Are you trying to make her room into a shrine?"

I had answered obediently, "No, no, Mom." I made a move to the door. My mind raced. I can't do this. I had put my shaking hand on the doorknob and sank to my knees, crying uncontrollably.

God has his way to bring you to your knees, to let you know he is there. My mother said again, "Open the door, Marianne." This time-- not so demanding or commanding--this time I heard her pain and compassion for me.

I opened the door. The smell of Tina's perfume lingered in the air, clinging to the curtains and the clothes she left on the bed, as if it had refused to leave. I looked at her room and walked to her dresser. I put my hands, palms down, on her makeup and belongings scattered there, I looked up. I saw my reflection in the mirror--or was it Tina's. Could I possibly cry any more? I saw a kiss. Tina kissed the mirror before she left. Tina blotted her lipstick on the mirror sometimes by kissing the mirror and smiling. With a contented look at her makeup she would say "Perfect!" A kiss, a kiss of good-bye.

I put my hands down on the kitchen table that I had been cleaning, as I did that day on the dresser in Tina's room. The tears came easily now. I didn't hold them back. Sobs, heaving me to a point of no breath. "I love you, Tina," I choked out. I felt Tina's arms

surround my body from in back of me and heard an "I love you, it's okay. I'm sorry." The comforting lean of a head on my back, was that Tina's perfume I smelled? I touched the hands that held me. I looked at them and turned. I saw my granddaughter, Fallon. She was holding me, with silent tears running off her cheeks and dripping off her chin. We held each other for a moment, or maybe it was a lifetime. The shared grief and loneliness for Tina was felt more than said.

"We'll be okay," I said. For a girl of fourteen, she knew and understood more than I realized. We smiled at each other because of our weakness, and with our foreheads together, ensured each other we could get through this. We could go on living the best we could. We finished cleaning the table together, all three of us, Diana, Fallon, and I, in silence.

by Marianne Cashman

Awake

Sleep eludes me.
The hushed sounds of night
intrude into my mind,
and Morpheus is put to flight,
leaving a void to be filled
by cares and worries
ignored all day.
All the anxieties,
are pushed to the rear
of myriad thoughts,
to emerge without invite,
twisting and growing
out of all proportion
to their original selves.
My body follows, too,
the convoluted turnings
of my mind,
and sleep eludes me.

by Jeanne Hue

What Happened, Man?

Gerry and Ginsberg are cold and dead, in the ground.
Kesey's stoned and out of town.
We've come to the end of the brotherhood song.
The children brandish knives upon each other's throats.
and their loaded 45's sit snug in lunch boxes
nestled safely between Oreo cookies and a ham sandwich.

Where are you now, oh ancient hipsters?
Black leather Beats beat down and broken
wheel black leather wheelchairs down ghostly geriatric wards.
Where are you now, Day-glo dreamers?
Have you gotten off the bus and into your Mercedes?
Where is the girl with flowers in her hair?
Where is the man with revolution in his veins?

We ask ourselves, where did we go wrong?
but there is no we.
There is you, and then there is I
You do what you need to survive,
and I do what I need to stay alive.
We stand here
bleeding, slicing each other's wrists
with the icy ridges of hardened jagged hearts.

by E.S.P.

Empty

For two weeks it has rained. The humidity is stifling, as if everything lived inside a plastic bag. Sometimes it thunders with fierce flashes of lightening; but even after, the air hangs like damp towels on a clothesline, holding moisture like a sponge. Even the faithful breeze from the grove of old maples is absent. No curtains flutter, no leaves ruffle. Nature stands as still as a sentry on guard.

Inside the house, Karen looks at the huge mess left for her in the kitchen. Heaps of dirty pots and pans sit aimlessly on the stove and dishes piled high with crusted and old food are scattered everywhere. Ashtrays overflow with old cigarettes, their filters ground into each other making the air smell stale and unclean. Empty liquor bottles stand out boldly along the counter, intending to intimidate and coerce. She knows this message is meant for her. It practically screams her name as she looks at all the clutter before her. It's always the same, day after day, with no regard for her efforts or feelings. But she doesn't bother to complain. She knows there's a price to pay for having an opinion. Better to keep it to herself--better yet, to never even form one.

After a while, she tends to her chore. With robotic motion her hands work in orderly fashion...sorting, collecting, tossing away. She is used to order, used to expectations and used to not asking questions. In this household she has no rights, hardly any privileges. She is an empty vessel, devoid of promise, numbed by circumstance and ignorance. What good would it do to try to change, what difference would it make? She reluctantly accepts her fate for what it is, seeing no way out. But what her mind can't seem to grasp, her heart secretly wishes for. Closing her eyes, she imagines the coolness of an autumn day, a favorite book, the luxury of cheerful company--a tranquil place where people actually smile, and make pleasant conversation, a place far beyond the confines of this room.

She sighs and keeps moving. Blood starts to pump in her ears. Her throat begins to feel thick and suddenly it's hard to swallow. This always happens when she begins to wander...when she begins to feel. But she knows that this is as good as it gets, this life of hers. There will never be lazy Sunday afternoons with long walks in the woods or someone to share it with. She will always be as she is right now--ordinary, capable of nothing, glued to this kitchen floor.

Finally done, she turns away from the counter, and quickly realizes that Paul is watching her. Stopping short, she freezes. By the look on his face, she knows he's been there a while, no doubt thinking her guilty of some crime. His fists clench and unclench and she begins to shake. Huge waves of familiar fear start to roar up her spine. In harsh and cutting tones, he asks suspiciously, "You okay, or what?" She swallows hard and says what she always says, what she knows he wants to hear. His eyes reflect dark chasms of evil light. How can she ever believe God lives in all men?

"It's nothing," she lies, "just this damn heat." And approaching his stiff presence, she rubs the taut muscles of his arm, reassuringly rehearsed. Never flinching, he holds his penetrating gaze, lights a cigarette and walks away.

The rain continues to fall in steamy sheets. The stagnant air will not budge. She sweats large drops that form on her face and pool in the creases of her neck. Staring at nothing, she wonders what to cook for supper.

by Denise Tagan

Jewel Box Morning

Life resembles a long string of glass beads, each day manufactured from the same mold. Once in a great while, amid the strung-out matched mornings of rushing to go somewhere else, we find a gem--an occasional day that starts out with nowhere to go, for a few hours, at least.

How wonderful to have time to listen to the burble of coffee brewing, while your nose twitches in aromatic anticipation. It never smells so good when you're hurriedly searching under the bed for your other shoe. And it doesn't taste the same when you're quickly gulping it down hot enough to melt the enamel off your teeth. There's even opportunity to have a refill.

As you leisurely sip at the heavenly brew, you watch the awakening of Mother Nature. The sun slowly inches its way above the line of saplings along the pondside, and the silky surface of the water is ruffled by the day's first breeze. The hard sparkle of the frost turns to pearly iridescence as it evaporates between the inky bars of shadow. And the sunbeams do you a favor by clearing your windshield before you have to go out and scrape ice.

How nice to sit with your mate and converse, for a change. No list of instructions, or messages to give and take, but a sharing of ideas and musings and quips, too long pushed to the back of ordered priority. There's just the two of you, the kids are in school, and it almost feels like...old times, perhaps?

There's time to write a letter, long overdue, to a distant friend. Or maybe a phone call is in order, if you're not into letter writing. There's a last chapter to read, or a new recipe to try, or, maybe, a stolen extra hour or so of sleep. It's okay, you've earned it.

There are not many of these mornings for most of us; we should learn to cherish and appreciate them while we can.

by Jeanne Hue